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Effects of a Simulated Predator on Free Operant Responding

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Poster Presentation 20

EFFECTS OF A SIMULATED PREDATOR ON FREE OPERANT RESPONDING

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The present experiment investigated whether the scent of a predator would alter responding of rats in a Skinner box. Six rats were trained to press a bar for food, and then pressed the bar in both the presence and absence of predator scent (red fox urine). The effect was measured by the latency of the first response and by the total responses in the session. Data were averaged across the six rats for each session. The results indicated that there was an effect on the bar pressing. There was a longer latency to first response compared to baseline, although the latency decreased over time, indicating habituation. This increased latency to first response is attributed to species-specific defense reactions, which are the rat's innate reaction to a new stimulus (Bolles, 1970). The habituation suggests a reduction in fear responses over time. Future research will need to address additional dimensions of the phenomenon.